



ASIAN AMERICANS
**ADVANCING
JUSTICE**
AAJC

August 31, 2015

Chairman Tom Wheeler
Commissioner Mignon Clyburn
Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel
Commissioner Ajit Pai
Commissioner Michael O’Rielly
Federal Communications Commission
445 12th Street, SW
Washington, D.C. 20554

Re: Comments in Support of Restructuring the Lifeline Program to Include
Broadband Subsidies for Low-Income, Asian American and Pacific Islander
Communities; WC Docket No. 11-42

VIA ELECTRONIC FILING

Dear Chairman Wheeler and Commissioners:

Asian Americans Advancing Justice | AAJC submits the following preliminary comments regarding the requirement that Lifeline providers offer broadband services to qualifying, low-income households, specifically, to the Asian American and Pacific Islander (AAPI) communities. These comments respond to points outlined in the Federal Communication Commission’s (Commission) Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking on reforming and modernizing the Lifeline program.¹

Advancing Justice | AAJC is dedicated to promoting a fair and equitable society for all by working for civil and human rights and empowering Asian Americans and other underserved communities. We provide the growing Asian American community with multilingual resources, culturally appropriate community education, and public policy and civil rights advocacy. With respect to telecommunications, Advancing Justice | AAJC works to promote the adoption of subsidized broadband services and reduce barriers to critical technology, services, and media to the Asian-American community.

Introduction

¹ *Lifeline and Link Up Reform and Modernization*, WC Docket No. 11-42, FCC 15-71, Second Further Notice of Proposed Rulemaking, 80 Fed. Reg. 42669 (proposed July 17, 2015) (hereinafter *Lifeline Reform SFNPRM*).

We agree with Chairman Tom Wheeler that “one of the [Commission’s] most fundamental responsibilities is to ensure that all Americans have access to vital communications services.”² Asian Americans need online access to be a part of and participate in the national community.

Advancing Justice | AAJC recognizes that one of the biggest challenges in a disconnected world is getting people from different cultures and backgrounds to understand one another,³ especially understanding the needs of the AAPI community. Michael W. Kwan, the OCA National President, noted that although studies show that 81% of Asian Americans use broadband, income, educational achievement, and cost are all indicators of how likely a household is to adopt broadband services.⁴ Rachelle Chong, the Regional Vice President of Government Affairs for Comcast in California, asserted that the Internet can help a child become a tech helper for the family where the child can help the family apply for jobs or pay healthcare information online.⁵ She stated that Internet could connect Asian-American families in the United States with their families abroad through inexpensive voiceover Internet protocol services, such as Skype or Vonage.⁶ Domestic and abroad families can benefit from these connections because they can become more familiar with the Internet and the Internet’s impact on their daily lives.⁷ We understand that making broadband a required offering of Lifeline providers is ambitious, but a necessary endeavor.

According to the Pew Research Center, among households with school-age children, 15.5% of Asian Americans with an annual income under \$50,000 lacks high-speed connection at home.⁸ We desire to reduce this percentage to zero for all Americans. Asian-American adults want practical information that focus on the local community—such as job listings with entry-level skills, local housing listings, and community information.⁹ They also seek online resources, access to language translation tools, instructional materials, and information in native

² *Lifeline Reform SFNPRM* at 130 (emphasis added).

³ Darrell West, *Digital Divide: Improving Internet Access in the Developing World Through Affordable Services and Diverse Content*, CENTER FOR TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION AT BROOKINGS (Feb. 2015), http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/02/13-digital-divide-developing-world-west/west_internet-access.pdf, at 22.

⁴ Nick Lee, *OCA Applauds Introduction of Lifeline Program Modernization Bill*, OCA ADVOCATE (June 2, 2015), <http://www.oceanational.org/news/234567/OCA-Applauds-Introduction-of-Lifeline-Program-Modernization-Bill.htm>.

⁵ David Ka Wai Pan, *Low-Income Asian American Households Could Afford Internet with Internet Essential*, ASIANWEEK: THE VOICE OF ASIAN AMERICA (Aug. 17, 2011), <http://www.asianweek.com/2011/08/17/low-income-asian-american-households-could-afford-internet-with-internet-essential/>.

⁶ *Id.*

⁷ *Id.*

⁸ John B. Horrigan, *The Numbers Behind the Broadband ‘Homework Gap’*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER 2 (April 20, 2015), <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/04/20/the-numbers-behind-the-broadband-homework-gap/>.

⁹ Wendy Lazarus & Francisco Mora, *Online Content for Low-Income and Underserved Americans: The Digital Divides New Frontier*, THE CHILDREN’S PARTNERSHIP 15-16 (March 2000), <http://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED440190.pdf>



languages.¹⁰ Access to the Internet will allow Asian American adults to engage in cultural exploration and development, cultural spaces about ethnic and local cultural interests, and health information.¹¹ Comparatively, children desire to participate through web-interactivity, youth-friendly tutorials, and self-expression.¹²

Asian Americans in Poverty

Advancing Justice | AAJC recognizes that because there are some AAPIs who have high median incomes, policymakers may overlook all Asian Americans during the broadband dialogue. This exclusion unfairly generalizes the incomes of a few representatives, when in reality, many Asian Americans require the same needs and supports to the Internet that are afforded to other minority groups.¹³ This portrayal affects the notion that low-income Asian Americans need access to the Internet.

We urge the Commission to keep in mind that the modernization of the Lifeline program is ultimately designed to help those who need assistance the most. If the Federal Communications Commission fails to recognize that the Asian American community is not only made up of diverse ethnicities, but spread across various social classes and income brackets, society will misconceive that the Asian American community does not need subsidized broadband services. This gap in understanding will have the effect of leaving segments of the Asian American community to fend for themselves.¹⁴ Therefore, disparities in wealth, health care, and education within the Asian American community will be left unaddressed.

We want the Commission to recognize that AAPIs are one of the fastest-growing populations in poverty since the Great Recession.¹⁵ This factor withholds some Asian Americans from getting online. A 2013 National Coalition for Asian Pacific American Community Development report showed that there was a dramatic increase in the AAPI poverty rate (45.2%) from 2011 to 2012.¹⁶ The poverty rate in 2012 was 21.3% for Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders

¹⁰ *Id.*

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² *Id.* at 16-17.

¹³ Yena Lee, *Asian Americans and Affirmative Action: Through the Study of Fisher v. University of Texas*, 5 Geo. J. L. & Mod. Critical Race Persp. 127, 127 (2013).

¹⁴ Z.W. Julius Chen, *Diverse Among Themselves: Critiquing Asian Americans Supposed Gains Under Percentage Plans*, 14 Asian Pac. Am. L.J. 86, 109 (2009).

¹⁵ Karthick Ramakrishnan & Farah Z. Ahmad, *Income and Poverty*, CENTER FOR AMERICAN PROGRESS 6 (July 21, 2014), <https://cdn.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/08/AAPI-IncomePoverty.pdf>.

¹⁶ *Spotlight on Asian American and Pacific Islander Poverty: A Demographic Profile*, NATIONAL COALITION FOR ASIAN PACIFIC AMERICAN COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT (June 17, 2013, 2:19 PM), <http://nationalcapacd.org/spotlight-asian-american-and-pacific-islander-poverty-demographic-profile>.



alone.¹⁷ From 2007 to 2011, the Asian American poverty rate increased by 37% and the Pacific Islander poverty rate increased by 60% - a rate far higher than any other group and well-surpassing the U.S. national increase of 27%.¹⁸ In 2010, the ethnic groups with the most people in poverty were Chinese Americans and Asian Indian Americans.¹⁹ In 2006 to 2010, the poverty rate for Hmong Americans was 27% and for Bangladeshi Americans was 21.2%.²⁰ The Pacific Islander ethnic groups with the highest poverty rates were Tongan Americans (18.9%) and Samoan Americans (16.2%).²¹ The top metropolitan statistical areas with the most Asian Americans living in poverty were: New York, New York; Los Angeles, California; San Francisco, California; Chicago, Illinois; San Jose, California; Houston, Texas; Sacramento, California; Philadelphia, Pennsylvania; Boston, Massachusetts; and Seattle, Washington.²² While many of these areas harbor some of the most expensive housing markets in the United States, nearly half of all poor AAPIs lives in the twenty most expensive housing markets.²³ Therefore, contrary to the public perception that all Asian Americans are high-income earners, a significant portion of the Asian American population are still struggling to get by.

The clearest effect that AAPI poverty rates have on broadband adoption is widening the “digital divide” between the rich and the poor. The unequal distribution in wealth makes it difficult for low-income, Asian American households to not only purchase broadband services, but also own the necessary technologies to get online. Without online resources, there is a lack of understanding about how the Internet can educate Asian American households. The poverty pigeonhole would be occupied by people who believe that they do not need broadband services or who are merely disinterested. Geographically, rural areas gain broadband subscribers faster than urban areas from 2009 to 2010 even though rural household broadband subscription rates (at any income level) generally fall below corresponding urban rates.²⁴ According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Economic Research Service calculations based on the U.S. Census Bureau Current Population Survey data, 28% of households in urban areas with incomes between \$20,000 and \$39,999 do not adopt broadband services because they are not interested; whereas, 26% of households in rural areas, in the same income range, do not adopt broadband services because they are not interested.²⁵ Forty percent of households in urban areas with incomes between \$20,000 and \$39,999 do not adopt broadband services because they are too expensive;

¹⁷ *UCLA Asian American Studies Center: 2015 Statistical Portrait of Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians, and Other Pacific Islanders*, UCLA ASIAN AMERICAN STUDIES CENTER, <http://www.aasc.ucla.edu/cic/stats2014.aspx> (last visited June 15, 2015).

¹⁸ Ramakrishnan & Ahmad, *supra* note 14.

¹⁹ *Id.* at 6-7.

²⁰ *Id.* at 7.

²¹ *Id.*

²² *Id.*

²³ *Id.*

²⁴ Rural Broadband at a Glance, UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE 4 (June 2013), <http://www.ers.usda.gov/media/1133263/eb-23.pdf>.

²⁵ *Id.*



whereas 34% of households in rural areas, in the same income range, do not adopt broadband services because they are too expensive.²⁶ High-priced broadband services lead to a lack of motivation to educate oneself about the benefits of the Internet. The more educated a person is about the informational realms of the Internet, the more likely he or she is likely to subscribe to broadband services.

Furthermore, the perception of high median family incomes makes it more difficult to get resources and services to low income Asian-American communities.²⁷ When broken down by ethnic groups, the Hmong and the Bangladeshi have poverty rates that rival that of the African-American population.²⁸ Many AAPIs lack a reliable source for financial information or advice.²⁹ Twenty-five percent of AAPIs said that they do not know who to turn to, and there is significant reliance upon the Internet.³⁰ Asian Americans should be able to know something as basic as a credit score.³¹

The Commission should also understand that, within the AAPI community, there is a strong correlation between higher limited English proficiency (LEP) rates and higher poverty rates.³² For instance, the Hmong LEP rate is 61%, while its poverty rate is 53%.³³ Ultimately, broadband adoption is hindered by this language barrier.³⁴

However, the following agencies are a few examples of government agencies that address the LEP dilemma online:

- The Department of Homeland Security's U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services has a multilingual resources page with information in 24 languages.³⁵ For example, one can download a frequently asked questions document about Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals and naturalization on the USCIS website.³⁶

²⁶ *Id.*

²⁷ *Asian-Americans: Smart, High-Incomes And . . . Poor?*, NATIONAL PUBLIC RADIO (May 20, 2013), <http://www.npr.org/player/v2/mediaPlayer.html?action=1&t=1&islist=false&id=185534666&m=185534657>.

²⁸ *Id.*

²⁹ *The Rise of Asian Americans*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER, <http://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2012/06/19/the-rise-of-asian-americans/> (last updated April 4, 2013).

³⁰ *Id.*

³¹ *Id.*

³² Allison Kelly, *Asian Americans, Pacific Islanders: Linguistic Barriers to Broadband Adoption*, POLITIC365 (Sept. 15, 2011 1:00PM), <http://politic365.com/2011/09/15/asian-americans-pacific-islanders-linguistic-barriers-to-broadband-adoption/>.

³³ *Id.*

³⁴ *Id.*

³⁵ See generally <http://www.uscis.gov/tools/multilingual-resource-center>.

³⁶ See generally <http://www.uscis.gov/humanitarian/consideration-deferred-action-childhood-arrivals-process/frequently-asked-questions>



- The Department of Health and Human Services works to ensure that all AAPI families understand the law.³⁷ The Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration Office of Behavioral Health Equity hosted consumer-focused webinars and produced videos in Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese to support health insurance outreach, enrollment, and understanding of health insurance benefits.³⁸
- Additionally, the Department of Housing and Urban Development will launch “HUD Speaks,” a two-year pilot aimed at improving communication and enhancing efforts for English Learners and LEP individuals.³⁹
- In January 2015, The Department of Education and Department of Justice released joint guidance reminding states and school districts of their obligations under federal law to ensure that English learner students have equal access to a high-quality education and the opportunity to achieve their full academic potential.⁴⁰ The Department of Education released two fact sheets about schools’ obligations under federal law to ensure that English learner students can participate meaningfully.⁴¹ The fact sheets were translated into Chinese, Cambodian, Hmong, Korean, Laotian, Tagalog, and Vietnamese as well as other non-Asian languages.⁴²
- In 2014, the Department of Agriculture funded a pilot APPI LEP Resource Center to provide LEP AAPIs with greater access to USDA resources.⁴³ The Center provides translated materials for Hmong farmers and fisherman to assist them in building successful farm and rural enterprises.⁴⁴
- The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services partnered with the Initiative to produce in-language Google Hangouts and videos on the Affordable Care Act in Korean, Vietnamese, Chinese, Hmong, Burmese, Khmer, and Lao.⁴⁵ If subsidized broadband services were a required offering of Lifeline providers, AAPI individuals can access government resources and be informed citizens.

Healthcare

As a civil rights organization, we value health security for underserved communities. Advancing Justice | AAJC supports the Commission’s position on broadband services being essential to the public health.⁴⁶ We agree with the Commission that when patients utilize broadband in the interest of their personal health, it not only improves their own lifestyles, but also reduces health care-related costs for both the patient and the healthcare providers.⁴⁷ We support Commissioner

³⁷ *Fact Sheet: The White House Summit on Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders*, OFFICE OF THE PRESS SECRETARY 4 (May 12, 2015), <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/05/12/fact-sheet-white-house-summit-asian-americans-and-pacific-islanders>.

³⁸ *Id.*

³⁹ *Id.*

⁴⁰ *Id.*

⁴¹ *Id.*

⁴² *Id.* at 4-5.

⁴³ *Id.* at 5.

⁴⁴ *Id.*

⁴⁵ *Id.* at 4.

⁴⁶ *Lifeline Reform SFNPRM* at ¶ 27.

⁴⁷ *Id.*



Mignon Clyburn’s position to underscore health care because, if the Commission does not, Asian Americans will “remain stuck in the digital badlands and cycles of poverty for another block of years.”⁴⁸ As indicated in current research, health insurance is the most important service need to AAPIs.⁴⁹ Between ages 45 and 64, 84% of the AAPI population does not have a personal doctor.⁵⁰ Logistical barriers may exist, such as language and unfamiliarity with the health care system, especially among older people.⁵¹ Between ages 50 and 64, 20% of AAPIs have no health insurance, while 15% of the total population between ages 50 and 64 in the United States has no health insurance.⁵² In order to ensure that Asian Americans have access to browse for local physicians and schedule appointments, the Commission needs to require Lifeline providers to offer subsidized broadband services to this community.

For example, in a study conducted by the Center for the Study of Asian American Health of New York University, 55% of Vietnamese participants rated their health as “fair or poor”, and 15% expressed that they had problems understanding information about their health.⁵³ Vietnamese Americans underutilize mental health services, and this may apply to other ethnic groups as well.⁵⁴ However, the Commission points out that a study on type 2 diabetes patients concluded that utilization of software loaded onto broadband-capable mobile devices that provided mobile coaching in combination with blood glucose data, changes in lifestyle behaviors, and patient self-management substantially reduced negative symptoms of type 2 diabetes.⁵⁵ Therefore, the Commission should conduct community outreach and work with community organizations to synthesize information on the correlation between broadband adoption rates and health care accessibility. This is especially important for LEP Asian Americans, other language minority groups, and underserved communities with low digital skills, broadband awareness, and broadband adoption rates.

A survey conducted on the “important needs and wants for living a good life” of Chinese Americans showed that 97% of respondents desired to stay physically fit.⁵⁶ Ninety-three percent of respondents desired good health and medical insurance, good relationships with their children or parents, and staying mentally sharp.⁵⁷ Another survey conducted on the “important services for living a good life” of Chinese Americans showed that 85% of respondents desired medical

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 133.

⁴⁹ *The Health and Healthcare of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders Age 50+*, AARP RESEARCH CENTER 6 (Jan. 2015), <http://www.aarp.org/content/dam/aarp/home-and-family/asian-community/2015-01/AARP-Report-Health-and-Healthcare-AAPIs-50-Jan2015.pdf> (hereinafter *Healthcare of Asian Americans*)

⁵⁰ *Id.* at 11.

⁵¹ *Id.*

⁵² *Id.* at 12.

⁵³ *Id.* at 23.

⁵⁴ *Id.* at 7.

⁵⁵ *Lifeline Reform SFNPRM* at ¶ 27.

⁵⁶ *Healthcare of Asian Americans*, *supra* note 46, at 7.

⁵⁷ *Id.*



insurance for any age.⁵⁸ Eighty-two percent of respondents desired personal records to be safe and accessible.⁵⁹

A survey conducted on the “important needs and wants for living a good life” of Filipinos showed that 96% of respondents desired good health and medical insurance for them and their families.⁶⁰ Ninety-four percent of respondents desired staying mentally sharp.⁶¹ Ninety-three percent of respondents desired to maintain good relationships with their children and adults.⁶² Ninety-two percent of respondents desired to stay physically fit.⁶³ Another survey conducted on the “important services for living a good life” of Filipinos showed that 90% of respondents desired medical insurance for any age.⁶⁴ Eighty-seven percent of respondents desired personal records to be safe and accessible.⁶⁵ The Commission can fulfill these desires by requiring Lifeline providers to offer subsidized broadband services. With broadband services, Asian Americans can study dietary charts and regimens, learn from fitness videos through mainstream platforms, and pinpoint the most affordable healthcare plans.

Typically, Asian Americans may not know the right questions to ask—or even whom to ask—concerning their health care needs.⁶⁶ They do not have a clear understanding of how to assess their medical problems and symptoms in the new cultural context.⁶⁷ With Internet access, AAPIs will be more informed about their medical needs and can seek appropriate treatments with a click of a button.

Education

With respect to education, we urge the Commission to make broadband a required offering of Lifeline providers to close the “homework gap.” The Commission aptly noted that the lack of broadband access outside of the classroom makes it difficult for students complete their homework assignments, explore the subjects they study in school, and apply for scholarships.⁶⁸ We agree that the lack of Internet access leads to reduced academic preparedness, decreased academic performance, and classroom engagement.⁶⁹ We reinforce Commissioner

⁵⁸ *Id.* at 31.

⁵⁹ *Id.*

⁶⁰ *Id.* at 35.

⁶¹ *Id.*

⁶² *Id.*

⁶³ *Id.*

⁶⁴ *Id.* at 37.

⁶⁵ *Id.*

⁶⁶ *Asian American Health Priorities: A Study of Montgomery County MD 2008*, ASIAN AMERICAN HEALTH INITIATIVE 26, http://www.aahiinfo.org/english/pdf/needsAssessment/AAHI_01AssessmentReport.pdf.

⁶⁷ *Id.*

⁶⁸ *Lifeline Reform SFNPRM* ¶¶ 18, 20.

⁶⁹ *Id.* at ¶ 18.



Rosenworcel’s concern to close the homework gap because one-half of all jobs require some level of digital skills, and, by the end of the decade, that proportion will increase to over three-quarters or 77 percent of all jobs.⁷⁰

The high level of education attainment among Asian Americans masks significant differences across national origin groups.⁷¹ Among Asian Americans, Southeast Asian refugee populations tend to have the lowest levels of educational attainment.⁷² For instance, fewer than 15% of Cambodians, Hmong, and Laotians have a bachelor’s degree or higher.⁷³

It is important that the Commission considers the longevity of the education sector as college enrollment of AAPIs is projected to increase to 1.4 million students—nearly twice the amount of AAPI students who enrolled in colleges in 1995.⁷⁴ Broadband subsidies will make it easier for AAPIs to adopt Internet services to inform themselves about various pathways to higher education.

Conclusion

We recognize the importance of qualifying, low-income AAPI households accessing broadband to develop appropriate interventions to reduce health disparities and close the homework gap. We urge the Commission to consider our viewpoints because making broadband a required offering of Lifeline providers will continue to preserve the cornerstones of the Internet—maintaining freedom, openness, and diversity⁷⁵—and the representation of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders as part of a national community. The Internet can promote social cohesion and political integration of AAPIs. While a great deal can be accomplished with the basic infrastructure of the Lifeline program, AAPI communities and other underserved communities need high-quality broadband services and optimal subsidies. Let us make it possible for low-income Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders to click on their desktop icon and pull up a working homepage.

We hope the Commission considers and addresses our concerns as it works to promote affordable broadband services for low-income, Asian Americans and underserved communities across the nation. If you have any questions or would like to discuss further our comments,

⁷⁰ *Id.* at 135.

⁷¹ Ramakrishnan & Ahmad, *supra* note 14, *Education* at 3; *See also* Lee, *supra* note 3 (affirming that statistics can hide deep disparities in broadband access within our community that dictate a need for Lifeline modernization).

⁷² Ramakrishnan & Ahmad, *supra* note 14, *Education* at 3.

⁷³ *Id.*

⁷⁴ *Id.* at 1.

⁷⁵ Darrell West, *Digital Divide: Improving Internet Access in the Developing World Through Affordable Services and Diverse Content*, CENTER FOR TECHNOLOGY INNOVATION AT BROOKINGS (February 2015), http://www.brookings.edu/~media/research/files/papers/2015/02/13-digital-divide-developing-world-west/west_internet-access.pdf, at 22.



please contact Carl Hum, Vice President of Policy and Programs at chum@advancingjustice-aajc.org or 202.296.2300 extension 138.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mee Moua". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping initial "M" and a long, horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Mee Moua
President and Executive Director

